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General Council

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INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY LIFE

1. A new look for our family

The Maynooth Chapter pointed out that "circumscriptions are developing that are smaller than in the past. There are many of them, spread over all continents and they are nearly all becoming international" (7.2.1). This implies the transformation and eventual disappearance of the old "national" Districts and the birth of international apostolic groups, which are small and, in the initial stages, depend directly on the General Council. Gradually, our family is taking on a new look: international and intercultural community life, presence in all the continents and an increasing preponderance of confreres from the south.

- A multicultural character

Our Congregation was born in Europe. The missionaries of Poullart des Places set out for North America, Asia and the coast of West Africa (1778). Under the influence of François Libermann, Africa became the special focus of our mission and over the last few decades, our spiritan family has put down deep roots in this continent. Spiritans arrived in Brazil in 1885 and in recent years we have spread into other Latin-American countries. Our long-standing commitments in the islands of the Indian Ocean (Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion) and our more recent arrival in several countries in Oceania and Asia have opened the doors of these two continents for us. We are now present in all five continents.

Our witness has drawn young people to our family from nearly all the continents, people of different races and cultures. The Congregation has consequently set up structures that enable Spiritans from different countries to preserve their own identity, develop their own organisation and leaders and have their own means of formation. We also continue to put down roots in those places to which we are sent. Our continuing presence and closeness to the people adds weight to the witness we give. Living amongst other people, particularly the less fortunate, leads to our mutual enrichment. This is where our sense of the universal takes on flesh.

- The road to internationality

As missionaries sent to "those who have not yet heard the Gospel message", to "those oppressed and most disadvantaged" and to those places "where the Church has difficulty in finding workers" (SRL 12), it has always been expected of Spiritans that they break out of their own frontiers as they move towards other people. In this sense, "the Congregation has always had an international character" (General Chapter 1980, no 201) and there have always been Spiritans of different nationalities working side by side.

Since the 1968 Chapter, successive General Councils have moved in the direction of international groups in order to respond to new missionary commitments. The concept of "internationality" has become a leitmotiv in the documents of the Congregation since 1974 and two documents in particular (I/Ds of September 1977 and February 1983) aimed specifically at making confreres familiar with this concept. Some international groups were set up, like those of Paraguay, Pakistan and Southern Ethiopia.
Since the 90s, several circumscriptions have become increasingly international by necessity, because of the lack of vocations in the provinces of origin and the availability of confreres coming from the south. But it is also something we are doing by choice: today, international and intercultural living is our progressive aim.

- The current situation

In recent years, there has been a marked growth in international and intercultural communities, as can be seen clearly in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International apostolic groups</th>
<th>Ethiopia, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Algeria, Mozambique, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, The Philippines, Taiwan, Australia, Croatia, Mexico, Paraguay</th>
<th>Involving 150 Spiritans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International foundations</td>
<td>North-West Africa (FANO), Southern Africa (SCAF), Democratic Republic of Congo, Indian Ocean (FOI), Haiti, Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Involving 154 Spiritans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largely international Districts</td>
<td>Madagascar, Mauritius, South Africa, Guyane, Amazonia</td>
<td>Involving 97 Spiritans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largely international Provinces</td>
<td>Central Africa (PAC), East Africa (EAP), West Africa (WAP), Angola, Brazil</td>
<td>Involving 610 Spiritans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts with confreres from elsewhere</td>
<td>Cape Verde, Kenya, The Gambia, Reunion</td>
<td>Involving 90 Spiritans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provinces with confreres from elsewhere</td>
<td>France, Spain, Ireland, England, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, Holland, TransCanada, Canada, USA East &amp; West, Nigeria</td>
<td>Involving 150 Spiritans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this, we can see that more and more confreres are being drawn into international and intercultural community life. It effects nearly every circumscription and is continuing to grow despite some initial reticence. The Congregation has freely opted for this development, but it is, above all, the fruit of the evolution of the world and society.

Twenty Spiritans replied to the questionnaire that was sent to them; we print below some extracts from their replies and relevant quotations from documents of the Congregation.

2.1 Benefits and advantages for mission and life together

- A sign of catholicity in the local Churches

The presence of an international religious institute in a local Church brings a certain catholicity and universality which helps it to enter more fully into the total ambit of the worldwide Church. The present emphasis on the local Church brings with it the risk of these same Churches turning in on themselves; as witnesses to universality, we can help these ecclesial communities to have a wider vision of the Church’s universality.

- The prophetic witness of charity

“Experience has led many confreres to the conviction that the practice of internationality in communities, circumscriptions and regions has a special evangelical and apostolic value”. Therefore, the General Council “encourages an openness to internationality, which is a witness to brotherhood and community” (Directory for Organisation nos. 21 and 11). “In our world, where people seem to be more and more suspicious and fearful of others, and erect more and more barriers to keep others out, the witness
value of people from different cultures living together “in one heart and spirit” is itself a very concrete living out of the Kingdom of God” (S.L. Taiwan). “I found that visitors to our community appreciated the cultural diversity in our lives. I think they saw it not so much as a witness to cross-cultural living but rather as an illustration of how we, as Spiritans, are both the same and different” (P.L. South Africa).

- The possibility of a deeper inculturation

The fact that we belong to different cultures invites us to go beyond a cultural and religious ethnocentrism and to immerse ourselves into a knowledge of the local people and their culture. In this way, we can come closer to the people, integrate with the local Church and avoid creating “replica mission Churches, i.e. an American Church, an Irish Church, a French Church. International living expresses in a very concrete way the catholicity of the Church” (P.A. EAP).

- A blessing and a path to freedom

“Internationality is a great blessing. We start with almost nothing in common between us and gradually, we construct a community together as we all strive to serve the people to whom we are sent. I don’t know how to describe or explain it, but I am convinced that internationality makes us free: free to build human relations, based on our service of the people rather than on our feelings; free to find new ways of communicating; free to invent new rituals of friendship. Certainly, one has to work hard to deepen one’s relationships with others, but the effort brings many rewards” (P.J. Paraguay).

- International living encourages solidarity within the Congregation

“The more we have confreres coming from different places, the more we build up our ties with different circumscriptions. And the Provinces and Foundations become supportive of the groups and concerned for their future.

This has the practical effect of an increased sharing of information, more material help and appointment of new confreres. As a consequence, our own vision expands: we have a wider appreciation of what is happening throughout the Congregation and feel more concerned with the problems of other circumscriptions” (M.T. Pakistan).

- A richer and more dynamic mission

“Our mission - what we are, what we are doing and why we are doing it - is greatly enriched by our different but complementary points of view and pastoral approaches” (Amazonia). Small, international groups help our missionary undertakings to be more sensitive to the culture of the people where we are working, more dynamic, inventive and adapted to different and changing situations. (cf. Directory for Organisation nos. 5 & 11).

![Tefe, Amazonia: 12 confreres from 6 different countries](image)

- A sign of the times: witness to unity

There is much emphasis today on interdependence and we tend more and more to think globally. Life in circumscriptions and communities which are mainly international and intercultural appears as a clear sign of the times and as a way forward which is in consonance with the Gospel and our mission. It is a witness to fraternity and communion, a witness to the reality of Pentecost, a witness to unity in diversity (cf. Directory for Organisation no. 11).
2.2 Benefits for the individual

- **On-going personal assessment**

  International community forces us to assess ourselves constantly, to discuss and to remain ‘disturbed’ in the best sense of the word (M.T. Pakistan). “We look on our differences as a benefit and we scrutinise our own ideas and convictions which were sometimes formed without serious reflection” (Mexico).

- **Personal growth**

  “I found a greater tolerance developing in myself, not just towards others from different cultures but also with those of my own culture...There has been a widening of my horizons; I have learnt that the way I was brought up is not the only valid way of authentically living out the Christian vocation” (P.L. South Africa).

- **Personal benefits**

  “We learn tolerance and love of the other person by respecting and accepting people as they are with all their differences. We learn the different worldviews, values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour within the different cultures and nations of the Congregation” (P.A. EAP).

- **Transformed by knowing others**

  “It is fascinating to learn other cultures, other languages, other oral traditions ...and this is essential for maintaining peace in an intercultural community. And by making this effort, we ourselves are transformed” (B.D. France).

3. Challenges in international and intercultural communities

If the benefits and advantages of international communities are clear to see, it is important, on the other hand, not to underestimate the problems that they can bring. It calls for a determined spirit of sacrifice, detachment and conversion. To bring about such a conversion, we need to dig deep into our charism, build up a mutual trust and cultivate a permanent availability. The confreres consulted saw things in this way:

- **Living in international communities is a task and a mystery**

  “As every Spiritan can witness, living in community is not easy and living in an international community is not a solution towards the making of an ‘ideal community’ which can never exist” (S.L. Taiwan). “International communities leads us “to feel, to understand and to experience the deep differences between confreres of different backgrounds; it also teaches us that we can never fully understand all that goes into making up our relationships - there is always an element of mystery in it... So this sort of community life is like a laboratory, or a whole package of experiences where we can continue to prepare ourselves for our on-going missionary role” (M.T. Pakistan).

- **Awareness of cultural differences**

  Each of us has his own way of living and thinking, fashioned by his own culture. Cultural characteristics, which continue to influence us despite superficial changes, differ considerably from one culture to another. For example, the way we understand and live out our religious poverty, our use of money and means of communication, can be very different.
and potentially disruptive. (P.L. South Africa; B.D. France). While identifying these cultural
and religious differences, are we able to see
them as sources of mutual benefit? And are we
sufficiently open and available to allow ours-
selves to be challenged by each other and
thereby grow in our understanding of our spiri-
tual charism?

- Rooted in our own culture

It is not possible for us to cross frontiers if we
are not, first of all, deeply rooted in our own
culture, if we do not have a direct interest in it
and a certain insertion in the local Church
from which we come. We have to appreciate
our own culture if we want to be open to the
culture of others. “It would certainly be unreal-
istic to think in terms of an internationality that
would exclude that indispensable rooting in a
particular culture in a circumscription of ori-
gin, with all the ties that are implicit in that
concept. Different cultural and ecclesial gifts
are of great value to the Congregation. The
difficult task is to achieve a balance between
preserving one’s roots and, at the same time,
being open to internationality” (Directory for
Organisation no. 22).

- Develop a constructive attitude

Life in an international community helps us to
appreciate the values that others have adopted
and to be open up to new horizons and per-
spectives. This teaches us to be more tolerant
and patient with other people and to be aware
of our own weaknesses. In such communities,
each one is expected to contribute his own
talents and experience and, at the same time,
learn from the others. (S.L. Taiwan).

- Overcoming prejudices

On joining an international community, we
inevitably bring with us some fixed ideas and
judgements, as well as our own limited experi-
ence of this world. “Prejudice comes from a
lack of reliable information and prevents au-
thentic encounter” (Ejisu, Ghana). “We find it
difficult in such communities not to seek to
dominate others, or make judgements based on
our previous personal experiences. There are
some who regard themselves as infallible in
community” (P.C. Haiti). But trust and frater-
nity will grow if we let them; working together
in the service of the poor, following the same
pattern of life in community - and even the
passing of time - all help us to open up to one
another in a spirit of confidence, brotherhood
and mutual help.

- Individual characters

Some said that life in international commu-
nities is no more difficult than those in which
everybody is of the same culture. Tensions
can arise in any community, including those
of national groups or where all come from the same
circumscription. In general, friction is much more likely
to be the result of incom-
patible characters living to-
gether than of the presence
of different cultures - or at
least they can begin for rea-
sons of incompatibility and
then deteriorate further be-
cause of the difference of
cultures. The character of
individuals can build up or
destroy the spirit of any
community (B.D. France; P.J. Paraguay).

Some hesitations regarding international groups

Most conferees today are prepared to live in inter-
national and intercultural communities, but there
are still some with reservations. They feel they are
not necessary, that one should not seek out avoid-
able difficulties, or they feel that they have not
been prepared for such an experience. Others will say that living with foreigners increases community tensions, makes agreement difficult and results in pastoral work being less successful. It is true that at times we all feel tired, but that is part of any community living. There can also be a fear that one’s autonomy and security will be threatened. But such difficulties simply underline the importance of not bringing a rigid ideology to such communities and show the need for careful individual and collective preparation in view of the demands that are inherent in the experience (Directory for Organisation no. 21).

4. Clarification of certain points

Despite all that has been said above, there remain some very real problems regarding international groups that need to be clarified:

Finance

This is an important and sometimes worrying area regarding international groupings which, at times, can be a source of tension and conflict. For example, where some members of the group have access to financial resources from friends or from their Provinces of origin while others have nothing, it can lead to resentment and feelings of inequality. Our Rule of Life asks us to share all we have (SRL 65); the Directory for Organisation adds that “any direct financial aid will be given to the Group as a whole, not to individual confreres” (no. 64). Obviously, every member has to give financial support to the Group if the necessary means are available to him. In this delicate area, transparency, co-responsibility and equality must guide our actions; the principle of the “common purse” is part of our Rule (no. 65).

Autonomy and interdependence

International Groups are in the front line of our mission which calls for creativity, autonomy and stability. It needs young, well-motivated members. But sometimes, these Groups can be very fragile. The policy of our Congregation is to encourage their autonomy and responsibility, both as regards their apostolic work and their human and financial resources: “Circumscriptions which are fully international have need for structures which will ensure their stability” (Directory for Organisation 23). From the juridical point of view, every group which has its own major superior has the autonomy of a circumscription. But very often, they need the support of the whole Congregation, either because they are operating in poor countries or because they still have few local members. But this must not lead to a situation of dependence in the Congregation, since we all need each other (for personnel and finance) and we are jointly responsible for the whole of our spiritan mission.

The ties that each Spiritan has with his circumscription of origin roots him in a particular family, group and Church. But this must not prevent his total commitment to the circumscription to which he is appointed. It is there that we carry out our missionary vocation and experience a new fraternity; it is there that we answer a new call to solidarity with another group in a local Church. The circumscription of appointment has its independence from the one from which it was born. We are expected to take up our share of responsibility in this missionary field and to place our trust in this new solidarity. So if the question arises of the possible transfer of a confrere back to his circumscription of origin, there must be a dialogue.
between the two superiors concerned to ensure that these international groups should not be weakened. If necessary, recourse can be had to the General Council.

Solidarity in the Congregation

It is a part of our family feeling that we should aim at an equality amongst us that will allow all to live with dignity. The Rule of Life asks all circumscriptions to contribute what they can spare and even what they still need. We are reminded that all our material goods are at the service of our mission (SRL 72). The Maynooth Chapter encouraged the setting up of partnerships between circumscriptions and asked “the General Council to supervise, organise and direct the solidarity between all circumscriptions” (6.7) and to organise fund raising at the level of the whole Congregation. Following on the Enlarged Council at Pittsburgh, the General Council took steps to find new resources. All this assumes that we manage carefully the goods we already have and that our lifestyle is “simple and modest”, bringing us closer to the poor whom we are called to serve (SRL 71).

The role of the General Council

Unity and solidarity within our Congregation remain crucial. The role of the General Council is to watch over the sharing of our human and financial resources, direct and coordinate our spiritan mission (above all that of the weaker groups) and to instill our life and mission with the spiritan charism. In fact, the Maynooth Chapter asked for more attention and intervention from the General Council regarding initial formation, the solidarity of the Congregation and new missionary engagements (mainly international).

5. Looking to the future

Some confreres have asked for a guide for living in international communities, so we end with a few suggestions in that direction:

- Initial formation should prepare confreres for international/intercultural living

- Each should be given the possibility of doing part of his formation in an international community. Young confreres could be exchanged between the different formation centres.

- Everybody should have a period of “stage” during training; this should be programmed to give experience of working in an international/intercultural setting, where language learning would be given high priority.

- Learning other languages should be encouraged.

- Where possible, international meetings of young Spiritans in training should be organised.

- In formation programmes, the charism and spirituality of the Congregation will be included.

- Some suggestions for life in international communities

Here is a selection of suggestions made by confreres:
- An effort should be made by all to speak a common language, preferably that of the country where the community is situated; this can be a great help towards binding the confreres together.

- Where there is a predominance of confreres from one particular cultural background, the unconscious tendency is to impose their way of seeing things, leaving little space for the sensitivities of others. It is preferable for there to be a balance of nationalities and cultures within the same group.

- It is important that the culture of reference for the community should be that of the country in which it exists. Internationality needs to be "situated", i.e. lived with the people of the local Church, otherwise the group will continue to be something foreign.

- Communication is important for any group, but when the group is international, it becomes crucial. It must be remembered that some cultures are very reserved when it comes to one's personal life.

- It is desirable that from the start, the community should reach an agreement regarding pocket money: clarity in this area is of great importance (SRL 69).

- Provinces and Foundations of origin should keep close links with confreres who have been appointed to an international community, especially if they are the only ones from their circumscription.

- Superiors have a particularly important role in such international groups; they need to visit the confreres, pay attention to the individual, promote unity and on-going formation and look after the organisation.

- Opportunities for common reflection and sharing must be created: Confreres should be encouraged to know each other well, evaluate the direction the community is taking, analyse and deepen the pastoral work, pray together, create friendship.

- Organise celebration of feast days and national holidays, community outings, cultural meetings etc.

- Be able to offer the new arrivals a good community atmosphere, time for learning the local language and culture and for getting to know the local Church and people.

Conclusion

This internationality that is being lived by an ever-growing number of Spiritans calls for an increase in solidarity, a genuine sharing of goods and a greater concern for one another. Life in international and intercultural communities will be a distinguishing feature of our Congregation in the years to come.

The present movement of globilisation tends to reduce everything to the same level and leave a "tabula rasu" in the place of cultural diversity. Our way of living should be a counter-witness to this, supporting and respecting different peoples and cultures, both in our place of origin and in the country where we live out our missionary commitment.
A LOVE THAT IS GENUINE  (1Jn 3.18)

A CALL TO INTEGRITY IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

The celebration of the anniversaries of our Congregation touches each one of us profoundly. It makes us long to live out the inspiration of our founders and of the Spiritans who have gone before us, in all its fullness. But such a desire inevitably implies facing up to the truth, for without this, the inspiration is in danger of remaining no more than a sterile dream. At the Enlarged General Council in Pittsburgh, we were warned of the need to reflect on the authenticity of our affective lives today; this paper is an attempt to help us in our search for the truth. What is at stake is not simply a secondary aspect of our religious missionary life; it concerns something at the deepest level of our being – our capacity to love, which implies an experience of being loved and the capacity to confide.

The quality of our love is revealed in the quality of our relationships, whether in our community life or in our ministry as witnesses to the Gospel. Our recent Chapters have stressed the importance of our religious life, lived in intercultural community, and of our mission in transcultural situations as a presence amongst people, as dialogue and solidarity and as a witness to mutual friendship, sharing and collaboration.

This new emphasis in our life and our mission makes it more important than ever that we be transparent and honest in our human relationships. To love in truth is now a challenge for every Spiritan.

Consecrated Life: A Challenge to the Contemporary World

The Gift of Ourselves

Our Spiritan Rule of Life expresses in a concise but profound way the inspiration behind the consecration we made of ourselves on the day of our profession (SRL 50-54). Like all baptised Christians we have been called to a life of love and holiness, to carry on Christ’s mission in the Church, and to bear witness in the world to his values and his message. The call we received to the religious-apostolic way of life is a special gift of the Holy Spirit, inviting us to give ourselves completely in the Congregation to the service of God’s people. Recognising this gift and wishing to respond with wholeheartedness, in spite of our human limitations, we committed ourselves by a public and definitive act to a life of chastity, poverty and obedience, in order to witness to the Kingdom of God in our world. Our religious consecration is a journey of discovery: despite moments of weakness and doubt, we gradually come to know that God’s love can indeed fulfill all our desires, we learn to let go of our inborn longings for possessions and power and we experience a new freedom to serve God and our brothers and sisters. It is also fundamentally a journey of conversion, if we are to try to live fully for the Lord and for the people he has called us to serve (Vita Consecrata 35). In that sense, therefore, it is a gift of ourselves which, though made once and for all on the day of our profession, has to be renewed each day of our lives in faithful response to our vocation.
Prophetic Witness

A fundamental aspect of our religious commitment is its prophetic character in the contemporary world. We are called to witness by our words and by our lives to the primacy of Gospel values and to challenge all that is contrary to God’s vision of our world, where the poor have a special place. If prophecy is to be truly persuasive our lives must be in harmony with the message we proclaim. In every age, the three evangelical counsels radically challenge the values of contemporary society. They give a special insight into the inherent goodness in human sexuality, the legitimate desire to possess material goods and to make decisions for oneself. Faithfully lived, they challenge the perennial tendency to dissociate these values from our responsibility to our brothers and sisters.

Challenge of Consecrated Chastity

The joyful living of the vow of chastity, in particular, challenges everything that would evaluate love at less than its true worth. The modern world rightly emphasises many positive aspects of human life and existence hitherto neglected or undervalued. In particular, it stresses the inherent goodness and beauty of the world and the human body, the primacy of the individual human person and their right and freedom to control their own destiny. However, this has given rise to a pervasive world culture where the pursuit of pleasure is seen as an end in itself. Sexuality is taken out of the context of human wholeness and is reduced to an object of personal satisfaction; it is divorced from commitment and interpersonal responsibility, without reference to any objective criteria, religious or secular. Sexuality has consequently been elevated to an inordinate degree and has become a means of domination, exploitation and depersonalization of others, rather than an expression of mutual self-giving in loving communion. The erotic pervades the cinema, music and the press and conveys the message that sexual experience, centred on the needs and rights of the individual, is essential for the full development of the human person.

Consecrated chastity, joyfully lived, fundamentally challenges this view and witnesses to the possibility of living a full and balanced human life in the celibate state, with the power of God’s love. It becomes all the more convincing when our lives give evident witness to our unselfish love for every individual person, independent of their social and cultural background, religion or status, and our commitment to the promotion of their human dignity.

Honesty and Integrity in Our Relationships

The quiet testimony of a faithfully lived commitment to consecrated chastity is offered to everyone – young people, engaged couples, husbands and wives – and “meets a growing need for interior honesty in human relationships” (VC 88), as indeed does a life of faithful commitment in Christian marriage. Clearly, if this is to be effective, if we are really to witness to the fact that the power of God’s love can accomplish great things within the context of human love, our own lives must be beyond reproach. Inappropriate relationships with women, with other men and worse still with minors, greatly undermine this fundamental message of a life that professes to conform to Gospel values. In addition to eroding our own sense of personal fulfillment in the way of life we have chosen, such relationships cause serious and lasting damage to the individuals concerned. The recent scandals that have emerged in the Church in regard to the immoral behaviour of some clergy and religious have deeply affected our credibility and, regrettably, our own Congregation has not been immune from these accusations. The situation has been compounded by evidence of mismanagement and, in cases, of cover up on the part of some entrusted with the responsibility of leadership. Many perceive these transgressions as a serious abuse of the power we have in virtue of our position and a fundamental betrayal of the sacred trust upon which our ministry is built. We are called more than ever to honesty, transparency, humility and conversion.
Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Obviously the fact that we have committed ourselves to a life of consecrated chastity in the celibate state does not remove our natural human tendencies or our need for human affection, fulfillment and intimacy. In addition, we are all deeply affected—perhaps more than we would care to admit—by the prevailing philosophies of our times. We remain fragile people who carry a treasure in earthen vessels. While we rely on God’s power at work in our human weakness, as in all walks of life, prudence, self-discipline and self-denial are essential for achieving personal integration and maturity. Moreover, we are called as professional people, with privileged access to the intimate details of other people’s lives, to the highest standards of ethical practice.

- Personal communion with God in listening to his Word, in daily meditation and prayer, is at the heart of our calling and an indispensable means of supporting us on our journey. “True prophecy is born of God, from friendship with him, from listening to His Word” (VC 84). The celebration of the Eucharist, the “source and summit of Spiritan living” (SRL 93) and the frequentation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are essential sources of nourishment and renewal (SRL 93, 95).

- A spiritual director, soul-friend or spiritual companion is of invaluable assistance in enabling us to see ourselves objectively and to evaluate our relationships and the motivations behind them (cf. Maynooth 3.2). This should be a normal part of every Spiritan’s spiritual journey.

- The importance of genuine community living, where each confere feels a sense of belonging, acceptance, appreciation and support, cannot be overstated in the context of our emotional life and affective needs.

- True friendships, both within the Congregation and with laymen and women, are signs of the love and affection that existed between Jesus and his closest followers. They help us to develop our personality to its full potential in addition to supporting us in our life and ministry (SRL 59.2).

- A balanced lifestyle between work, prayer and recreation, where due attention is given to caring for one’s physical and emotional health, is very important for a well-adjusted personality.

- Aware of the power that we exercise, often unconsciously, over people in our pastoral care, we must always be careful to maintain clear boundaries in our relationships. In particular, we must refrain from exploiting the trust and dependency of others, not using them to satisfy our personal needs for acceptance, affection and intimacy.

- Boundary violations are committed when we knowingly or unknowingly cross the emotional, physical or sexual limits of another person. Since these vary from culture to culture, it is imperative for us as missionaries in transcultural situations to familiarise ourselves with the norms of acceptable behaviour in the cultural context in which we are called to live and work.

Formation

Contemporary Context

Candidates for the Spiritan life are a gift from the Lord, which we welcome with gratitude (SRL 103). From a wide variety of cultural backgrounds they bring with them qualities and talents that enrich the Congregation and they continue to inspire the Spiritan family with their enthusiasm and generosity. However, as belonging to a particular age they also carry with them the fragilities of the young people of their times. Formators and
spiritual directors are entrusted with the responsibility of assisting them to discern and respond freely to the call addressed to them by Christ; they assist those called to the Spiritan way of life to grow progressively in the total gift of themselves in his footsteps. In the contemporary context this is a particularly demanding, if rewarding, task. Those who seek to join us today are often marked by the effects of a pervasively permissive mentality in the area of sexuality and relationships and an understanding of personal freedom that challenges the foundations upon which religious life is based. Some carry with them the scars of broken family relationships and the hurt of rejection, perhaps even abuse, in the family circle. Against this background the importance of adequate human and spiritual formation cannot be overstressed in the preparation for a life of total consecration to God, freely and joyfully made, in the service of the poor and abandoned.

**Fundamental Orientations**

Formation is primarily the work of God who calls us into his service to follow him, to imitate him and to allow ourselves to be transformed by him. A candidate for Spiritan life who enters into a formation programme accepts to be guided in the response he wants to give to the calling he has received. He is helped by those with greater experience in the Spiritan life to better understand his own call and to respond to it according to his own human and spiritual history; in this way he effectively learns to form himself. The action of the formator must therefore be at the service of the action of God and the free will of the individual that God desires to form (GSF 9,10).

- Openness, trust and transparency on the part of the student in relating to formators and spiritual directors are indispensable if the formation process is to achieve its purpose. The members of the formation team can do much to create such a climate if they are available to students, are good listeners and foster an atmosphere of fraternal simplicity, liberty and realism in the community.
- In an age when the call to authenticity is one of the signs of the times (Evangelii Nuntiandi 76), the personal witness and quality of life of the formator himself are of paramount importance. This has serious implications for those responsible for the selection and appointment of confreres to the formation ministry and for the formators themselves, whose personal integrity should be beyond question. Notwithstanding their human limitations, they should give evident witness to joy and fulfillment in the faithful living out of their own commitment. While this may apply in a special way to the members of the formation team and to the other Spiritans resident in the formation community, it is also applicable in fact to all confreres who should inspire their younger brothers by the way they live.
- Formators and spiritual directors should be familiar with the various aspects and stages of the development of the human person, especially in the psychological area. As indicated in the Spiritan Guide for Formation (GSF 25), it is very useful if at least one formator in each circumscription has a more specialised training in this field, from which the other formators can profit.
- Experience has shown that psychological testing is a valuable tool in vocational discernment, when carried out by a qualified and competent person and it should be availed of wherever possible (cf. GSF 27). While therapeutic counselling may be recommended in particular cases, clear evidence of serious personality disorders at any stage during formation should preclude further advancement in the Spiritan way of life (cf. Canon 689).
• Clear emphasis should be placed on the fact that for Spiritans the commitment to celibate chastity derives from our call to religious life; it is not simply a necessary consequence of ordination to the priesthood.

• Regular spiritual direction is indispensable throughout the Spiritan life, especially during the years of initial formation. The spiritual director has a unique role in assisting a student to reflect upon and integrate his past and present experiences and to accept and deal with his inevitable limitations, ambiguities and failures. Equally important is the development of a life of personal communion with God in prayer, who sustains us on the path to which he himself has called us. In these ways the student can gradually acquire the personal discipline necessary for a life of faithful commitment.

• True friendships are essential for a balanced personality and are a valuable source of support in our life and ministry. Students should be encouraged to develop healthy friendships within the Spiritan family and with laypeople, both men and women, while respecting the boundaries implied by our commitment. It is very important that students be given the opportunity of normal everyday contact with lay men and women, both married and single, and that they be assisted to reflect upon and evaluate their relationships. In addition, the involvement of suitable laymen and women in the formation programme and the discernment process is very desirable, where at all possible.

• Care should be taken to ensure that the overall formation programme in a circumscription includes courses on human psychology and psychosexual development. Workshops/seminars etc. should also be arranged periodically with the aid of competent people to deal openly and candidly with matters related to sexuality, affectivity and relationships.

• The contemporary means of social communication offer enormous possibilities for furthering the cause of Christian mission in the world. It is important that students are introduced to these areas during their time in initial formation and that they are taught to use them with prudence and discretion. The use of the Internet calls for particular attention today.

Role and Responsibility of Confreres in Leadership

Confreres who hold positions of leadership in the Congregation have a special role and responsibility in this whole area. As the leader and the animator of the circumscription/community, the Superior is called to help each confrere respond faithfully to his missionary religious vocation and to lead a joyful fraternal life (cf. SRL 47) Every professed member, by virtue of his religious profession, commits himself freely to observe the Rule of Life of the Congregation (SRL 80). An essential aspect of leadership at all levels is to oversee fidelity to this commitment.

Challenge and Encouragement

In the first instance, this involves encouraging, assisting and, where necessary, challenging confreres to respond faithfully to their calling. In particular, Superiors should encourage confreres to adopt a balanced and regular rhythm of life, where adequate time is given to prayer, reflection and recreation in addition to work (cf. Maynooth 3.2). The findings of contemporary psychology clearly suggest that over-involvement in ministerial activity at the expense of other important aspects of a
balanced lifestyle is not conducive to healthy living in a world that has become increasingly more complex and stressful.

- In this regard, confreres need to be made aware of their need for self-knowledge and encouraged and facilitated to take periods of renewal that permit both professional updating and genuine spiritual replenishment and, where necessary, attention to their physical well-being (cf. SRL 145).

- In addition, those in leadership should make every effort to promote a style of community living that supports the emotional life of confreres, facilitates open and trustful discussion in the delicate area of relationships and fosters a positive and joyful commitment to chastity (Maynooth 3.11, 4.11).

Confreses Living Apart

Secondly, Superiors have a particular responsibility in regard to confreres living at a distance from the Congregation (Maynooth 4.19, 4.20). Such confreres include those who do not have an official appointment from their Major Superior to their present assignment, as well as those who have distanced themselves from the life of the circumscription to which they belong and fail to participate in a minimum of activities essential to local or regional community living. Clearly, there may be many contributory factors that have led a confrere to live apart from the Congregation, for some of which the Congregation itself may have direct or indirect responsibility. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on all Major Superiors to make every effort to contact such confreres, to invite them to regularise their situation, to return to community living and to accept an appointment in the spirit of availability that is at the heart of the Spiritan calling. Openness, sensitivity and delicate tact are called for in dealing with confreres who have personal difficulties and adequate time must be given for dialogue, for the repairing of broken relationships and for discernment of the future (cf. SRL 39.3). In certain cases, it may well be more judicious for Superiors to approach an individual living at a distance from the Congregation through another person who has his trust and confidence.

- However, it is imperative that such irregular situations are not allowed to continue indefinitely and, should all efforts fail to get a confrere to return to the Congregation or, alternatively, to choose freely an alternative way of life, the process of dismissal in accordance with Canons 696 and 697 should be initiated.

- Where confreres have effectively left the Congregation but have not formalised their departure, it is very important that the relevant canonical procedures for separation - laicisation (SRL 257, 261 – 263), juridical establishment of dismissal (SRL 267, 268) - be completed. It is to be recalled that confreres are entitled to legal representation in accordance with Church law.

- In all cases, it should be borne in mind that the Congregation may be held civilly liable for exemplary damages on the part of any member if it has neglected to implement the Spiritan Rule of Life in his regard.

Accusations of Inappropriate Behaviour

Thirdly, where an allegation of inappropriate sexual behaviour involving potential contravention of civil law on the part of a confrere is concerned, it is vital that every circumscription should have a written policy/ set of procedures for dealing with such matters. Since the legal situation varies from one country to another, procedures are normally worked out at the level of the local Episcopal Conference or the Conference of Religious Superiors.

- It is essential that these or similar procedures be adopted by every Spiritan circumscription
and that they be strictly adhered to should a particular case arise. The Spiritan norms should reflect the fact that the situation of a member of a religious congregation differs in some aspects from that of a diocesan priest.

- In all cases involving an accusation of inappropriate behaviour on the part of a confere, the Superior must ensure that the complaint is listened to fully, honestly and compassionately.

- He must equally make sure that prompt action is taken to determine the accuracy and seriousness of the complaint. An advisory panel should be set in place to assist him.

**Healing and Justice for Victims**

Where the evidence clearly indicates that there is substance to the accusation the Superior must have as his first concern the care and healing of those who have been the victims of such behaviour.

- This concern requires that, in so far as possible, the potential for further offence on the part of the confere be removed and that appropriate support and assistance be offered to those who have been harmed. In certain circumstances these may include family members of the victim who have also been affected.

- Where the nature of the accusation is grave, the Superior should remove the confere from active ministry and should obtain a professional assessment of his fitness for future restricted ministry.

- In such cases, concern for justice and healing for the victim calls for full cooperation with civil authorities and processes in accordance with local requirements. The prescriptions of civil and canon law should be carefully adhered to.

- It is recommended that a suitable confere be delegated by the Major Superior to deal with the juridical aspects of a case and that the latter be not directly involved at this level.

**Pastoral Concern for the Accused**

Superiors also have a responsibility to show pastoral concern for the care and healing of the confere involved. Following a straightforward, open and non-accusatory exchange with him about the accusation, the confere should be referred for appropriate psychological and spiritual guidance. A number of therapeutic centres have been established in various countries for this purpose and their services should be availed of for assessment and for subsequent treatment, where this is deemed necessary. In some circumscriptions no such facilities exist but competent and experienced professionals are available who offer this service. It is important that, in understanding with the confere concerned and without infringing on confidentiality, there be a clear arrangement for all relevant information to be provided to the Superior by the centre or professional engaged.

- One of the primary roles of the Superior in all these cases is to help to rebuild the personal dignity of the accused confere on the clear understanding that he may never be able to return to active pastoral ministry.

- In this regard it is very helpful to have a supportive Spiritan community in each circumscription, where the local Superior, and at least one other member of the community, are fully aware of the particular circumstances of the case and where the confere can be welcomed and assisted. Superiors should also avail, where possible, of the expertise of skilled priests/religious to accompany a confere in such a situation.

- It may be necessary in some circumscriptions to enter into dialogue with other religious
congregations/local ecclesiastical authorities with a view to a collaborative approach to the care and healing of priests and religious with serious difficulties in the affective/sexual area. Consideration should also be given to the training of one or other confere in the circumscription in this specialised area.

- Should a confere be wrongly accused of inappropriate sexual behaviour the Superior should make every effort to ensure appropriate counselling and accompaniment for him and to restore his good name, if the matter has come into the public domain.

It is vital that problems of this nature be addressed speedily, openly and honestly

Confreres with Difficulties: General Orientations

Understandably, many Superiors who have no special training or competence in these matters feel inadequately equipped to deal with such situations, particularly in the complexity of intercultural settings. However, it is vital that problems of this nature be addressed speedily, openly and honestly. Where a Superior – or indeed any confere – has good reason to believe that another confere has seriously violated accepted ethical standards, he has a moral obligation to take effective action without delay.

- In no case should the problem be ignored or the confere concerned be transferred to another post or sent on sabbatical leave/studies in the hope that the problem will solve itself.
- In general, the most appropriate place for a confere to deal with difficulties in the area of affectivity/sexuality is in his Province of origin; this does not exclude the possibility of seeking appropriate professional help outside one's Province of origin if such assistance is not available locally.
- When a confere with problems returns from his circumscription of appointment to his Province of origin, it is essential that all relevant information be given to the Provincial.

- In very serious cases, the Superior General should also be informed, either directly or indirectly, through the relevant correspondent on the General Council.
- Where necessary, Superiors should not hesitate to avail of the competencies and skills of others and to seek the assistance of a suitable professional counsellor in handling a particular situation.
- Accurate files should be maintained to show that every reasonable care has been taken by the Superior in dealing with the confere in question.

Conclusion

Thus we discover through our community life and our witness to the Gospel, our formation and our exercise of leadership, that to love authentically inevitably involves a struggle for each one of us. But this is a struggle that is at the heart of our Christian and religious commitment, one that brings us deep and lasting joy. As St. Paul puts it: "I may speak in tongues of men or of angels, but if I have no love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal..." (1Cor 13.1).

1. This does not refer to conferees who, with the permission of the Superior, live alone for reasons of the apostolate and who participate in the life of their circumscription.
2. Sample copies of protocols in use in different circumscriptions, as well as copies of the relevant prescriptions of canon law, may be obtained, on request, from the generalate.
3. For instance, where a criminal proceedings have been initiated against a confere in this area or where the future possibilities for ministry of a confere are seriously restricted.

On behalf of the General Council,

Pierre Schouwer